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## Book Reviews

**Wilson, Richard. *Worldly Shakespeare: The Theatre of Our Good Will* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016. Pp. 303).**

Reviewed by *Adam Hansen*\*

This volume represents yet another characteristically bracing and engaging work, from a scholar who has made a career of writing similarly stimulating books. Richard Wilson's laudable and crucial aims here are in accord with his other writing on Shakespeare: to situate him not only in relation to the 'worldly'—that is, material and ideological (especially religious)—contexts in which he wrote and was initially received, but also in relation to later contexts of his reception and re-writing, including in our own world now.

Along those lines, and citing John Hale, Wilson notes that "the age of Shakespeare was the 'high-point of cosmopolitanism': *for everyone except the English*" (249; italics in original). Plus ça change, non? Helena's "vows to take the road to the Field of the Stars" as a pilgrim to Spain in *All's Well That Ends Well* shows English audiences a bond and a history "they have repressed" (249). As the world knows too well, recent events have manifested a comparable English 'Europhobic' urge (265).

Here, as elsewhere, then, Wilson is critical of the "old myth of Shakespeare as mystic monarchist"; what makes this book a significant new development in his thinking (and in the age of Trump and Brexit) is the way it shows how "Shakespeare's paradoxical royalism has...been given a fresh populist spin", not least by being "inspired by a cult of the Catholic and Fascist jurist Carl Schmitt" (5). Schmitt's ideas—and his acolytes—are continually contested in *Worldly Shakespeare*, even as they are given the serious attention their current sway requires. This is another characteristic trait of Wilson's work, distinguished as it is by its profound engagement with both the traditions of and latest swerves in (largely continental) critical theory. If you're not up to thinking about and with Agamben, Derrida, Gadamer, Sloterdijk, or Žižek, then this book probably isn't for you. But if you'd *like* to be, Wilson offers an exemplary model of the way theory enables and does not inhibit: discussion of *Measure for*

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*Measure* is grounded in the diction of postmodern and deconstructive interpretation, the play being replete with “disappointing surrogacies, each a simulacrum or approximation that fails to duplicate the original” (232). Yet such discourse is, in the end, invoked to interrogate the text in terms of resolutely worldly political and religious contexts, not least when Angelo refers to having “Heaven in my mouth” (2.4): “In Shakespeare’s Vienna the Duke’s devolution generates a legitimacy crisis that extends to the most vicarious of substitutions, the transubstantiation symbolism of the body and blood of Christ” (232). Wilson, in turn, builds on the evidence about Thomas Middleton’s co-authorship to query whether we should even see it as *Shakespeare’s Vienna*: “The textual disintegration of *Measure for Measure* is fatal to the myth of Shakespeare as a mystic royalist” (237).

Wilson also ably shifts from the global and abstract to the local and particular, as when discussing the significance, for example, of *Pericles* and *King Lear* as performed in 1609 “in the Yorkshire Dales...by a company of outlawed Catholic players” (194) in a chapter on *Twelfth Night* and Iran. Given Wilson’s theoretical scope and inclusivity, it seems churlish to notice an absence, but perhaps some reflection on Homi Bhabha’s now old but still relevant work on the place and effects of incommensurability, mimicry and difference in colonialism (proper, post- and neo-) in *The Location of Culture* (1994) might have further enriched the discussions here about “incommensurable difference” between different “ideological or confessional” (3) systems.

With more than an eye on our current divisions and travails (not least violent censorship), *Worldly Shakespeare* contends that Shakespearean theatre offers “an agonistic drama of deliberate offence masked as good will, rather than of mutual understanding” (5). Furthermore, this “agonistic drive” comes from and stages “the irreconcilability of rival claims of citizen or sovereignty, equality or freedom, norm or exception, presence or representation” (6-7). This was a theatre of “decentered interpretation, of offence with good will” (15). With this perspective, few of Shakespeare’s plays pass without discussion, and few discussions leave Shakespeare’s plays the same. *Hamlet* emerges as “a form of holy terror” (18). Hamlet’s most famous soliloquy is ‘a deeply disturbing meditation on the absolute antagonism of the *jihad*’ (118): ‘To be or not to be’ is a question that takes us right into the mind of what we would now call a suicide bomber’ (125). In “Veiling an Indian Beauty: Shakespeare and the Hijab”, Wilson brilliantly explores concealment by scarf and silk across a range of early modern texts. In so doing, he contextualizes performances of religious identity and community, past and present. The “scarf / Veiling” in *The Merchant of Venice* 3.2. represents, obscures and reveals “an object of both danger and desire”, an embodied otherness made all the more dangerous and desirable in a theatre, as “a masking or ritualization of antagonism as the precondition of racial, religious, sexual and artistic freedoms” (165). When outlining his aims

for the text (and the study of Shakespeare), Wilson suggests “by staging toleration in conflict, these 400-year-old play scripts continue to provide us with pretexts for our globalised yet multifaceted communities, in these paradoxical times of Facebook and *fatwa*” (14). Can there be a more critical and vital apprehension of Shakespeare than this? One slight quibble might be directed at the format of the book, which is set in small font, and with closely-packed lines. Closely-argued ideas like these deserve better.

Chesnoiu, Monica Matei, ed. *Shakespeare in Elysium: Romanian Afterlives* (Constanța: Ovidius University Press, 2016. Pp. 209).

Reviewed by *Andrzej Wicher*\*

## 1

The present book is a collection of academic articles, written in English, by various authors and concerning William Shakespeare and his works both in their original literary form and in their modern, predominantly theatrical, adaptations. Most of the articles are connected, in one way or another, with the Romanian culture and Romanian reception of Shakespeare.

The title of the book *Shakespeare in Elysium: Romanian Afterlives* is somewhat mysterious because it suggests some vision of paradise, though not necessarily in the Christian sense of the word. The subtitle, on the other hand, suggests that we should expect some reflections on the Romanian reception of Shakespeare. Why should this topic awake any paradisiac associations is unclear. Neither is it clear why the editors of this book, by using the word “afterlives”, should emphasize the posthumous nature of Shakespeare’s career in Romania. There are not many places, outside England itself, where Shakespeare’s name and his works were known in the playwright’s lifetime. It is true that the introductory article by Monica Matei Chesnoiu entitled *Et in Elysium Ego: Shakespeare and the Place of Memory* goes some way towards explaining and justifying this title, but I am not entirely convinced by this argument.

## 2

The book opens with the Foreword by Paul Brummel entitled *Shakespeare and Rumania—An Enduring Love Affair*. It is a brief survey of the history of the reception, translations and theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare’s works in Romania. This text is written in very good English and I do not have any serious reservations about it. In a more critical vein, I do not think it is a distinctive feature of Romania, as the author seems to suggest (cf. 2), that Shakespeare is popular there as a tragedian, rather than as an author of comedies. Shakespeare’s tragedies have always been better known than his comedies, with the exception perhaps of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The author very justly points out to the political functioning of Shakespeare’s plays’ in Romania particularly in the times of the communist dictatorship. It is probably common to all East European countries that those plays were of great use to smuggle in the undesirable, from

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the authorities' point of view, ideological content, which was usually done without adding any new things because, owing to a deeply political nature of Shakespeare's most important plays, it was enough to emphasize some of their already existing aspects.

### 3

Let me now come back to the article by Monica Matei Chesnoiu *Et in Elysium Ego: Shakespeare and the Place of Memory*. The author focuses on the quasi-religious cult of Shakespeare and quotes the Dutch Shakespearean scholar Paul Franssen who said that "Such fantasies often take the form of Shakespeare's ghost's appearing on earth, or of mortals being granted an interview with his shade in Elysium" (7). This is naturally an allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the protagonist Aeneas meets, in Elysium, that is the abode of the blessed, the ghost of his father Anchises, who shows him a vision of his future and that of the great city which Aeneas, or rather his descendants, are going to found in Italy. It is a bold comparison and no doubt attractive, Shakespeare has often been treated as prophetic poet, even though the symbolic image of the protagonist meeting the ghost of his father, in the Shakespearean context, may rather remind is of the encounter between Hamlet and his father's ghost, which, unlike Aeneas's conversation with Anchises, did not bring the young Hamlet much good and led to a series of tragic events. But even if we accept the validity of seeing Shakespeare as a prophetic Elysium shade, it is not obvious why those Elysian aspects of his cult, or his personality, should be of particular importance in a Romanian context, which is what the title of the book seems to suggest.

The author often uses the phrase „Et in Elysium ego”, which she seems to understand as an expression of the wish to meet Shakespeare in Elysium and be guided by him: "... we all want to be identified with this semi-divine celebrity, we all want to be in Elysium, led by his benevolent shadow" (9). The article unfortunately contains no indication that the phrase in question is a paraphrase of the traditional "Et in Arcadio ego", which, in spite of being in Latin, was post-classical and invented apparently by the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Italian painter Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, 1591-1666), and later, more famously, used by the French painter Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The phrase meant apparently something like "I (that is the Death) am even in Arcadia (that is in a rustic and peaceful utopian region), and you will never escape from me", and was an echo of the much older, mainly medieval, maxim "memento mori" (remember that you have to die). This is certainly not what the author meant, but I do not object to her using this phrase, or its paraphrase, in a novel way. It is only a little regrettable that the historical context of the phrase has not been, at least in passing, touched upon.

The author uses also some witty neologisms such as „play-giarism”, or „wreader” (13) assuming, I’m afraid wrongly, that the reader will be familiar with them, so that they do not have to be explained or commented upon. On the same page, she uses the verb „to Frenchify”, which I do not think is used in English, where the only correct, albeit colloquial, form seems to be “to frenchify”

Generally speaking, however, the article in question provides the reader with brief summaries of the articles that are included in this volume and fulfils, in this way, a useful function, which is why I do not recommend any substantial changes.

#### 4

The next article is by Jean-Jacques Chardin and its title is *The Heart and the Eye in “King Lear”*. This article may cause some surprise because it is in no way connected with Romania. It is an interesting analysis of *King Lear* from the point of view of its use of symbols and archetypes. The author is particularly concerned with the symbolical use of the power of sight. He also points, somewhat in the tradition of G. Wilson Knight<sup>1</sup>, to the grotesque incongruity, or perhaps unrealistic congruity, of both Lear’s and his friend’s Gloucester’s world view.

I would partly object to the statement (18): “It had been admitted from the Middle Ages that a king’s property, passed on to him from earlier generations, was inalienable, hence Lear is not entitled to scissor up his kingdom”. Contrary to the author’s categorical statement, I would argue that such things did happen, even though they were perhaps more characteristic of Eastern Europe than of the West. I mean, for example, the division of the Kievan Rus after the death of Yaroslav the Wise (in 1054), or Poland after the death of Boleslaus the Wrymouth (1038). In the West one may mention the division of the Frankish kingdom between the three sons of Louis the Pious (840). It is true that those divisions took place only after the death of the old kings, and not during their lifetime, as in *King Lear*, and that one of the sons was given some kind of authority over the others, but it may be argued that Lear wanted to invest his youngest daughter with such authority. This would have been of course rather unusual because it was traditionally the oldest, not the youngest, child that was given this privilege. What is the most unusual is that Lear divides his kingdom between his daughters, rather than the sons. The fact that he did not have any sons is a poor excuse, medieval kingdoms simply were not, as far as I know, divided between daughters.

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<sup>1</sup> See G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire. Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy*. Routledge. London & New York 2008, pp. 201-234.

Besides, in the sentence quoted above, the author seems to assume that the action of Shakespeare's play takes place in the Middle Ages, which means that he ignores the fact that king Lear is most probably not a historical figure, and that if he really had lived in Britain then his reign would coincide with the lifetime of Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome, who lived, or rather could have lived, in the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BC, that is some 13 centuries before the beginning of the conventionally understood Middle Ages. Needless to add, we know very little about the British culture in the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BC. According to some, Leir was a Celtic god of the sea, which is a tempting hypothesis, especially if we consider Lear's intimacy with natural elements, yet we should realize that, according to some modern archaeologists, the first wave of Celtic settlement reached Britain only in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC.

## 5

Then we come across the article *After Four Centuries: Shakespeare's Ghostly Shadows* by Pia Brinzeu. This is an attempt to account for the various and appropriations of Shakespeare that have taken place during the 400 hundred years following his death. Also in this article we find no references to the Romanian context. The article is written in a lively style and contains a number of various cultural references that many readers may find interesting. The neologism "play-giarism" is extensively used as a synonym of literary appropriation. It is a pity the author does not stop to think for a while about the cultural and moral consequences of mixing up the idea of playing and the idea of cheating. Nor does she contemplate the possibility that actually the words "plagiarism" and "play" may be etymologically connected and derived from the same source. The article discusses briefly what can be called Shakespearean post-history, that is the possibilities offered by the characters who never appears in Shakespeare's plays but whose existence is mentioned or at least suggested, such as Romeo's first love Rosaline, the witch Sycorax from *The Tempest*, of the Macbeth baby, that is the child of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. This subject certainly deserves attention and may inflame many people's imagination.

## 6

The article *Socialist Readings of Shakespeare: Hard Line versus Alternative Perspectives* by Mădălina Nicolaescu offers the reader some insight into the grim reality of Stalinist ideology and literary criticism as they were practised in the communist Romania. Some of the authors conclusions and findings are rather predictable, but other may cause some surprise. It turns out, for example, that Jan Kott's famous book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* was not criticized for its obvious anti-totalitarian, and by implication also anti-communist, aspects,

but rather for its daring to compare Shakespeare with such modernist authors as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco (43). The latter again were held in low regard by the communist critics not so much because of the ideological content of their works, but rather because of their formal experiments considered unnatural or degenerate. So there seems to have been a marked tendency for the orthodox Marxist-Leninist critics to counter writers representing anti-communist views without making direct reference to those views. They are attacked in a remarkably oblique way. One might also suppose that the elements of English nationalism present in Shakespeare's work would find little approval from the point of view of the internationalist communist critics. Instead, however, it appears that they had no problems with what they called Shakespeare's patriotism, they praise it without reservations.

## 7

Odette Blumenfeld's article *Ophelia's Madness and its Representations in Two Romanian Productions* is concerned with what the author calls "rewrightings" of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, by which, apparently, the reader should understand a new interpretation of a given text, particularly a play, which is tightly connected with a theatrical performance, assuming that "to rewright" is a portmanteau word composed out of "to rewrite" and "playwright". Those "rewrightings" are clearly feminist in spirit, so that the figure of Ophelia receives much more emphasis than in traditional productions. Also her madness is depicted as more of an equivalent of Hamlet's madness, that is an act of rebellion against the conventions of seemingly behaviour. The scene of Ophelia's flower giving, because of its symbolic potential, seems to open up particularly great possibilities of a novel treatment.

## 8

Monica Matei-Chesnoiu's *Shakespeare's Tercentenary in the Old Kingdom of Romania: En Route to Secularization and Modernity* is largely focused on the achievements of the prominent Romanian scholar Dumitru Caracostea (1879-1964) as a critic of Shakespeare's works. I do not question the validity of the author's statements, but I was a little puzzled by the sentence concerning Shakespeare's plays: "As distinguished from Greek tragedy, fate is not manifested as an unseen power hovering over the tragic heroes' process of maturity, but as part of their nature, as they develop in certain circumstances". (77) The Oxford English Dictionary defines fate in the following way:

The principle, power, or agency by which, according to certain philosophical and popular systems of belief, all events, or some events in particular, are unalterably predetermined from eternity. Often personified.



Clearly, there does not seem to be much possibility for the notion of fate to be interpreted as part of somebody's nature. The author seems to suggest that the misfortunes of the Shakespearian tragic heroes and heroines are of their own doing, which does not involve, contrary to the above quoted statement, a different variety of fate, but rather leads to the conclusion that fate plays no role in Shakespeare's tragedies. What the author understands by Shakespeare's conception of fate is simply incompatible with the established ways of understanding the notion of fate.

## 9

George Volceanov's *On Romania's Contribution to "The Great Feast of Languages": Shakespeare World Translation Conference, Cologne 4-8 June 2016* seems to be a faithful account of what happened during that conference with a special emphasis on the author's views voiced on that occasion. I can, in principle, quite agree with the statement that Shakespeare's plays should best be presented in "contemporary, modern language" (85), but this seems to concern only the translations into foreign, that is other than English, languages. Does the author mean that Shakespeare should be given this modern linguistic form in all countries except the English speaking ones, where his plays should continue to be performed in the increasingly antiquated Early Modern language known as the original? It is certainly a pity the author does not try to address this question, even though I realize that is a rather difficult matter. The value of this article can be fully estimated only by somebody who is familiar with both English and Romanian, as it largely concerns various detailed problems of English-Romanian translation. The author apparently believes that the Romanian translations of Shakespeare are more "expressive" than the German and Polish versions (92) because of the "striking Latinity" of the Romanian language (93), but I take it as a very subjective and unprovable statement coloured by patriotic emotions. Would the author go as far as to claim that also in Shakespeare's original the passages where the Romance, or Latin, words prevail, as is often enough the case in English, are more expressive than the ones based on the Anglo-Saxon or Germanic vocabulary? Surely it is not the connection with a specific linguistic tradition, Latin, Germanic, or Slavonic, that makes the literary language expressive, but rather its being anchored in the living everyday language of ordinary people.

## 10

The article by Nicoleta Cinpoș entitled *Hamlet from the Bloc: 1990 and 2010* consists largely of reflections on the political function of the productions of Hamlet during the period of the communist dictatorship in Romania and after the

fall of that dictatorship. The author interestingly writes about the reactions of some British critics to the Romanian productions of *Hamlet*, the reactions that sometimes bear witness to the lack of understanding for the topical political allusions included, for example, in the stagecraft of those Romanian versions.

## 11

Marina Cap-Bun in *Why Was Shakespeare so Fond of Hecuba* argues that Shakespeare knew and made use of the ancient Greek play by Euripides about Hecuba, the wife of the Trojan king Priamus. The author discusses the meaning and theatrical potential of this, legendary rather than historical, character. She incorporates into this matter also some remarks on the modern Romanian play *Why Hecuba?!* written by the popular modern Romanian playwright Matei Vişniec.

## 12

Ana Maria Munteanu has written a review of the theatrical production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* entitled: *Postmodern and Classical: A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is remarkable how strongly this production is inscribed into the local Romanian context, with its links both to the great sea-port Constanța and the small, but culturally quite important, sea resort of Vama Veche, to which the action of the play is transferred. It is clear enough that this modern production departs in many ways, apparently with good results, from the mainstream tradition of staging *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

## 13

Estella Antoneta Ciobanu has written the article entitled *Alas Poor Yorick! Bodies Out of Joint in Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Seamus Heaney, Andreas Vesalius and Govard Bidloo*. This essay treats of the *memento mori* motif in Shakespeare and also in some modern authors, mentioned in the title. Much is made here of the mutually opposed modes of representation denoted by the German terms: *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. The author is also sensitive to gender issues and inveterately tracks down various misogynist motifs, particularly in Baudelaire and Heaney.

## 14

Adrian Papahagi has written an article entitled *Much Ado About 'Nothing' in King Lear*. The author is particularly concerned with the references to nothingness in *King Lear* which are of great importance in this play. The author

builds quite a complex structure around this idea, showing how it permeates the represented world of Shakespeare's play. It should be noted that the author makes correct use of the slightly esoteric Greek terms: *kenosis* and *anagnorisis*.

### 15

Oana-Alis Zaharia in her article *Translating Shakespeare into Romanian: On the Eve and in the Aftermath of the 1848 Revolution* deals with the beginnings of Shakespeare's reception in Romania. It is interesting to get to know that the translations of Shakespeare into Romanian were quite often used to strengthen the cultural bond between Romania and France, whereas in many other countries, such as Germany or Russia, his works functioned as a counterpoint to the French cultural influence, and were used to limit that influence. I assume that also in Romania Shakespeare's works revealed the perspectives and ideas that, for example, the French neoclassical drama could not offer, but the author does not say anything on this subject. The author writes also interestingly on the political uses of Shakespeare in the times of a great intensification of Romanian national feelings.

### 16

Lucai Opreanu wrote the article under a somewhat lengthy title: *Secret Codes and Small Rewrites: Fluid Authorship, Intellectual Games and the Power of Words in "Dr Who"—"The Shakespeare Code" and Other Revisitations of Shakespeare* deals with various uses and appropriations of Shakespeare in our post-modern culture. The article explores the ways Shakespeare, or rather Shakespeare's name, functions in rather irreverent parodies, spoofs and satires with a distinctly Bardoclastic tendency. In a culture dominated, to some extent, by a rather simplistic Bardolatry, this tendency is understandable, even though it can say very little about the nature of the phenomenon called Shakespeare.

### 17

The volume is concluded by the essay *Danube and Avon* by Richard Wilson, a well known British Shakespeareologist. The essay emphasizes the importance of the Danube as a river that, on the one hand, is a Romanian national river, connected in many ways with Romania's history, but, on the other hand, is also a European river par excellence bringing together many countries and nations lying on or close to its banks. Shakespeare, in the author's interpretation, as a pre-eminent and particularly mythologized European author, is a spiritual and literary equivalent of the Danube, being English and deeply European at the same time, and functioning as a powerful sign of Europe's unity in diversity.

This article is certainly a worthy coda to this remarkable collection of texts coming from a very important, though often overlooked, European country.

### 18

To sum up this review, I would like to say that I accept all of the articles included in it and I do not insist on any changes in them. I may have disagreed with some points or aspects of those articles, but I have not noticed in them anything that could be described as a scandalous mistake or shortcoming that absolutely requires a correction. Generally speaking, I find this volume to be an important enough contribution to a better understanding of the cultural role of Shakespeare and his works in both modern and historical Romania. The articles are, from a stylistic and grammatical point of view, well written, or very well written, and they all make good sense. Some of the articles, notably the ones by Jean-Jacques Chardin and Pia Brinzeu, are not concerned with Romania and its culture, so they may be seen as not quite belonging to this collection, but they still, in my opinion, may be included in it because they are strongly Shakespearian and valuable enough.

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15.05.2017

**Jarrett-Macauley, Delia, ed. *Shakespeare, Race and Performance: The Diverse Bard* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. 188).**

Reviewed by *Timo Uotinen*\*

After witnessing two recent all-Black and all-Asian Royal Shakespeare Company (henceforth RSC) productions, Delia Jarrett-Macauley, editor of *Shakespeare, Race and Performance: The Diverse Bard*, exclaims that “[w]e appeared to have lift off!” (16) Her optimism is well-founded as Shakespeare and race seem to be on the agenda in Britain, especially with the launch of the British Black and Asian Shakespeare Database in the Autumn of 2015, and the successful Indian Shakespeares on Screen conference in April 2016. However, with her feet firmly on the ground, Jarrett-Macauley adds the caveat that “rather than merely celebrating the opportunities to make ourselves visible, we need to ask how firm is our progress, how reliable and valid the sense of accomplishment.” (16) This caveat is worth pondering over, especially in the light of the socio-political events unfolding in Britain—the main geographical focus of the book.

As Robert Sawyer and Varsha Panjwani note in the introduction to this issue, 2016 will be remembered, at least in the United Kingdom, both for Shakespeare commemorations and for Brexit. Racially or religiously motivated hate crimes have risen alarmingly in England and Wales since the referendum vote. Due to these heightened tensions, *Shakespeare, Race and Performance: The Diverse Bard* is a timely read. This collection of interviews and essays deals with the aftermath of the British Empire and the multicultural society it has generated. Insightful pieces, both by academics and theatre practitioners, hold a mirror up to contemporary culture and politics by delving into casting, the role and place of women, diaspora, cultural stereotypes, and the body of the Other.

The history of the exclusion of Black and Asian actors and directors is long—a history easily forgotten in the public consciousness that has not properly registered the many centuries of Black and Asian presence on this sceptered isle. In this context, the Shakespearean keyword that is central to Jarrett-Macauley is “diverse”, denoting the varied backgrounds of the contributors to this collection, the different performers whom history chose to forget, as well as wide-ranging disciplines and the multiplicity of topics that this book addresses. The various subjective and scholarly viewpoints offer an idea of realities that minorities experience in theatre specifically and in day-to-day life in modern Britain generally. However, there are common strands between these diverse voices and my review will pick up on some of these thematic threads.

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### Traditional Shakespeare

One of the key concepts that this collection challenges is the idea of a uniform, harmonious, traditional Shakespeare—a Shakespeare without tension or traction. The notion of traditional Shakespeare that I invoke is the monolithic Shakespeare of Bardolatry, the idea that there is only one correct Shakespeare, whether in performance or interpretation, from the classroom to the stage.

In her essay, “Brave new Bard: Shakespeare and intersectional feminism in the British classroom”, Terri Power reflects on her years of teaching experience: “Many of the students enter my Shakespeare classes with very limited ideas because of the stigma of ‘traditional’ Shakespeare and ‘how it should be done’.” (177) This sentiment is echoed by Ayanna Thompson in her refreshing dialogue with Dawn Monique Williams: “I was always taught that Shakespeare is universal, his works are timeless, they appeal to everyone; and if you’re disturbed by anything in them, the problem is you not the text.” (55) This dogmatic, uniform Shakespeare has also been institutionalised in the world of British theatre. The Jamaican-born playwright, director, and producer, Pat Cumper, sees UK productions as aiming to maintain the status quo: “They are to my mind seen first and foremost as an affirmation of the superiority of the British literary tradition, then as vehicles for the talent of actors and directors as they wrestle the text into some fresh form. A cultural comfort blanket of sorts.” (158)

However, the certainty or “comfort blanket” of traditional Shakespeare is undermined by the texts themselves, as Iqbal Khan, the acclaimed actor and director, notes in his personal reflection piece, “1960s Birmingham to 2012 Stratford-upon-Avon.” He argues that Shakespeare’s works “are messy, violently charged, jarringly shifting in tone, bawdy and difficult texts; they are unstable texts”. (140) Instead of a traditional, monolithic Shakespeare, Khan is “interested in communicating the full richness of Shakespeare’s vision...plays that have multiple viewpoints, all valuable”. (144)

Naseem Khan, writer of the influential report *The Arts Britain Ignores* (1976) that brought exclusionary practices regarding minority arts into public discourse, explores the challenges and benefits of diversity in her debate-shaping essay. She takes the measured approach that “[t]radition cannot be ignored” but it should also not “be clung to rigidly” (47) either.

### Stereotyping and Resistance

Cumper emphasises that we should be concerned about the “insistence that actors of colour should play the part of servants, sidekicks or, in the case of Asian actors, perpetrators or victims of arranged marriages” (158) because theatre, and specially Shakespeare productions, play a mediating role in society

and the world represented on the stage is not cut off from the outside world. Moreover, we cannot “ignore the fact that Britain has for centuries been a vigorous maritime trading nation and people from all over the world have lived in its cities and ports and been part of all sections of British society.” (158) But this is forgotten in the cultural amnesia of the anti-immigration mind.

Jatinder Verma, artistic-director and founding member of Tara Arts, reflects on his own experience and points out that the discourse of immigrants as detrimental aliens became part of the political orthodoxy when Margaret Thatcher was being elected and this discourse has not been sufficiently challenged to this day. Producers routinely “make the assumption that Black and Asian actors are unsuitable for or incapable of working on the classics; and, conversely, many Black and Asian actors find the classics alienating.” (32)

The actor Vinta Morgan, in Micheal McMillan’s essay, “The black body and Shakespeare: conversations with black actors”, attests to this “English rhetoric of illusion” about diversity and colour whereby there is an attempt to soothe the lack of black cultural expression only by “symbolic gestures”. (123) Doña Croll agrees and argues that, “It isn’t that the theatre establishment is racist as such, rather that it is governed from and through the lens of white people.” (123)

Many stereotypes emerge when Black and Asian people are seen through the “lens of White people.” In her article, “Much Ado About Knotting: arranged marriages in British-Asian Shakespeare productions”, Varsha Panjwani focusses on one such stereotype regarding the Asian population—arranged marriage. Panjwani unpacks the Western confusion between arranged marriage and forced marriage: “Whereas arranged marriage is a cultural practice, forced marriage is an abuse of human rights” (102) and argues that British-Asian Shakespeare productions, such as those directed by Iqbal Khan and Samir Bhamra, offer a British-Asian lens of seeing the world, thereby contributing to the multiculturalism debate in Britain.

In a similar vein, Michael Pearce argues that the Shona version of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (called *Vakomana Vaviri ve Zimbabwe*) by Two Gents Productions “persistently undermines assumptions of authenticity and emphasises hybrid realities.” (73) For Pearce, this production deliberately resists a Western stereotype of Zimbabwe and Africa just as much as it challenges “nostalgic African nationalist imaginary.” (71) Pearce calls the production an “intervention into British representations” as it mixes “the unfamiliar within the familiar.” (74) Eldred Durosimi Jones in the opening article of this collection, “The Bard abroad in Africa,” gives a further overview of African responses to Shakespeare and outlines the history of Africans in Britain during Shakespeare’s lifetime. He states that “Shakespeare speaks very eloquently and relevantly in Africa, and often communicates ideas in the prevailing political climate about which local writers dare not speak.” (28)

As these production histories demonstrate, although British imperialism imposed Shakespeare on the colonised, it seems to have also offered a medium of resistance. For Verma, “Caliban’s accusation to Prospero—‘You taught me language, and my profit on’t/ Is I know how to curse’—takes on a complex poignancy. On one level, yes, the colonised has learnt how to abuse the coloniser. On another, he/she has learnt also the language of resistance.” (33)

### **Casting and Cultural Politics**

Returning to the UK theatre scene, Jami Rogers examines the work of David Thacker and Bill Alexander, “who [among others] provided opportunities to ethnic-minority performers before diversity was high on the agenda.” (110) In tracking the career of these two pioneers, however, Rogers uncovers the prejudices and blatant racism that Black and ethnic minority actors have had to deal with—and still do. She also delves into the casting traditions of *Othello* where casting a person of colour was a rarity until Thacker cast Rudolph Walker in 1984 and Alexander cast Jeffery Kissoon in 1993.

Lynette Goddard also discusses casting politics by looking at Josette Simon’s career and reactions to it. However, alongside Ayanna Thompson, she denounces the policy of colour-blind casting because “if it were true that we could be blind to colour, that race can bear no semiotic signification, then the very concept of colour-blind casting would be redundant—if we did not see colour then there would be no need to consciously ignore it.” (83) According to her a more productive route would be to encourage a “a colour-conscious colour-blindness...whereby directors demonstrate an awareness of the potential significations of race when casting black performers in Shakespearean roles and avoid reaffirming stereotypical perceptions of race and gender.” (84)

As these articles emphasize, colour-blind casting and the rhetorical espousal of multiculturalism, sometimes seem to be merely an exercise in ticking boxes rather than actually confronting the issues of race or class or gender and disability in a meaningful manner. Proper dialogue is no easy process but it is something we will need to fight harder for in the post-Brexit, austerity driven climate of modern Britain.

### **Dialogue**

Naseem Khan underlines the importance of dialogue: “Dialogue is never totally easy, but there is no substitute for it nor a better baseline for engendering creativity. [It is created by] above all a vision of society that recognises the proven value of difference rather than dwells on its difficulty.” (48) For Khan,



then, difference is to be mined and celebrated rather than discarded. She finds a successful example of enrichment through multiplicity in the Finnish women's choir, Kassandra, which employs the "different musical voices of its members to make a new whole." (47) Although the author does not comment upon it, there is an interesting link between Shakespeare, interculturalism, and Kassandra. The latter is not just a choir but a nationwide culture hub. Founded in 2000, it aims to promote interculturalism through art and culture. InterKult Kassandra, as it is known, was founded by theatre director Ritva Siikala and is a continuation of her Raging Roses (Raivoisat Ruusut) Theatre that was formed around an all-female adaptation of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* trilogy in 1988.

Shakespeare provides a shared cultural foundation upon which we can discuss the troubling issues that have risen to the surface post-Brexit. The works of Shakespeare in their diverse points of view can help us build a bridge over the rift of a divided Britain. *Shakespeare, Race and Performance: The Diverse Bard* has built the framework with which to start this process. This polyvocal collection is no doubt a great introduction to these significant issues. However, I did miss voices from the British East Asian contingent of Shakespeareans. The title of the book, then, seems to promise a more comprehensive coverage than it actually offers. Nevertheless, this is an important foray into the cultural tensions that shake our world. Sita Thomas, in her article, "Souks, saris and Shakespeare: Engaging young, diverse audiences at Shakespeare's Globe and the National Theatre" encapsulates the ethos that is needed: "The Bard is not just for 'us' or 'them', and can be used to educate people of all cultures and religious faiths." (173)